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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W PDAVIS, DBANKS, DOKEDIJI  
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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER MATTHEWS AND TWO OTHER  
FORMER OFFICIALS DIED SEPTEMBER 7

¶1. Veteran Liberian politician and former Foreign Minister Gabriel Bacchus Matthews died September 7, 2007 at a hospital in Monrovia. Regarded as "the father of multi-party democracy" in Liberia, he fell in and out of favor with successive Liberian leaders. The GOL is expected to announce a state funeral. Coincidentally, in the United States, two other pillars of Liberian diplomacy also died on September 7th; former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes, who served under President Tubman from 1960 - 1972 and was briefly Head of State after Tubman's death, and Angie Elisabeth Brooks who served as president of the 24th session of the General Assembly in 1954, and in addition to an active career in law and politics, held a series of UN posts between 1956 and 1966.

¶2. Matthews is credited with bringing about the downfall of the True Whig Party, which had ruled Liberia for over 100 years. After graduating from City University of New York in 1971, Matthews returned to Liberia and in 1979 founded the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), which opposed then-president William Tolbert. Matthews was jailed and charged with treason after protests he organized to oppose increased rice prices turned violent. Released after several months, Matthews transformed PAL into the Progressive People's Party (PPP) -- Liberia's first opposition political party -- in March 1980. He was then re-arrested after calling for Tolbert's resignation. Matthews remained in prison until the April 12, 1980 coup d'etat in which Tolbert's government was overthrown. He served as Foreign Minister under Samuel K. Doe until being fired in 1981.

¶3. Matthews continued his political opposition until being appointed Foreign Minister in 1990 by Interim President Amos Sawyer, a position he held until 1993. An unsuccessful candidate for president in 1985 and again in 1997, he became a supporter of 1997 winner Charles Taylor. Matthews was political advisor to George Weah during the 2005 election, and had lived in relative obscurity since then.

BOOTH